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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SECRET/NODIS/PARIS TALKS

INFORMATION
December 16, 1970

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Philip C. Habib
Henry A. Kissinger
John H. Holdridge

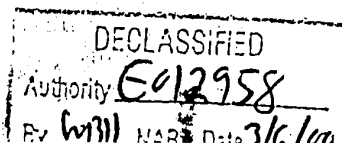
SUBJECT: Ambassador Habib's Conversation With
Dr. Kissinger on The Course of The
Paris Talks

TIME & PLACE: Dr. Kissinger's Office, December 14, 1970

Dr. Kissinger asked Ambassador Habib for his views on holding additional private meetings with the North Vietnamese, to which Ambassador Habib said that his idea in this regard was to go again for private talks after the first of the year. The first private meeting had gone about as expected, and there would have been more such meetings had there not been the "exercise" against the North. Their side recognized that it had the responsibility of setting a date. Despite some ambiguity on this they had indicated their responsibility by having their representative come to us to state that they were not ready for further private talks now.

Dr. Kissinger remarked that their strategy was depriving us of any hope of reaching a settlement through negotiations. They appeared to be trying to build up U.S. domestic pressure against us. Ambassador Habib agreed, adding that Congressional pressure was of more importance to them than domestic public opinion which they were not able to manipulate significantly. Returning to the issue of private talks, Ambassador Habib suggested that we wait for a while to see how things were going. If there were no further actions against the North, there would be some usefulness in compelling the North Vietnamese to talk about the President's five-point proposal in private meetings. Regardless of whether or not the other side talked about the five points, we would get some value in expressing readiness to discuss them, and we would also have on the record the fact that we had made such a proposal. Ambassador Habib remarked inter alia that he was pessimistic on the prospects for the talks, as were all the others in Paris.

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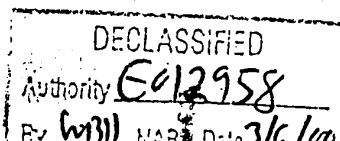
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Dr. Kissinger referred to the negotiating tactics of the Foreign Service as being always to keep things moving and always to look for an opening. Ambassador Habib denied wanting to negotiate just for the sake of negotiations. He felt that a great deal of our success in the negotiations depended on how we looked back in the U.S., and on this score we had been doing well. We were proving that the President was still for negotiations, and that was all we could do now in Paris. One component of this was that we had to try all angles, and in the context of the record could not avoid private talks.

Dr. Kissinger remarked that he was amazed to see Mr. Salens back on the Delegation. Salens, he recalled, had suggested that he, Dr. Kissinger, had kept Ambassador Habib on such a tight leash last year that we had missed opportunities. Ambassador Habib should know that he was emphatically not on a tight leash. Ambassador Habib said that he realized this, adding that we wouldn't have gotten anywhere regardless. They were showing no signs of movement at all.

According to Ambassador Habib, the other side would be operating in two time-frames in the coming year: Tet, and the October 1971 South Vietnamese elections. Looking ahead, they would also focus upon the 1972 U.S. elections. Thus, in the foreseeable future, i.e. four to six months, there were no prospects for movement. The enemy's focus in South Vietnam would be political and disruptive. Ambassador Habib didn't know if the enemy would succeed in his disruptive efforts, but Thieu was in for a difficult time politically and could actually be in real trouble depending on how he acted. Thieu could make it easier for himself if he moved against GVN personnel problems and corruption, and made his peace with Ky. Ky was capable of cooperating with Thieu. However, it was still too soon to tell how things would turn out.

Dr. Kissinger asked if it was in our interest to have Thieu win? Ambassador Habib replied that it was in our interest not to do anything to influence the outcome. In response to a question from Dr. Kissinger on the effects of our bugging out, Ambassador Habib observed that we wouldn't get support for this even from Big Minh. With respect to Big Minh, we needed to know what he was up to, and who was next to him. If someone unknown joined Big Minh, this question would become more complicated and difficult. Certainly An Quang was trying to pull strings,

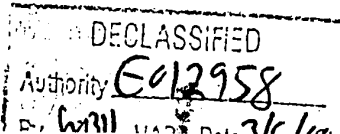
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two-thirds of Cambodia to losing 20,000 Cambodians. The very same mistakes were being made in Cambodia that had been made in Vietnam. Ambassador Habib surmised that the NVA/VC forces were building up for a "good hit" once the terrain dried out and would try to seize all the territory east of the Mekong. Once there, they would try to set up secure base areas from which they could go back into South Vietnam. Dr. Kissinger observed that they would try to build up the same sort of infrastructure and logistic system which they had before we went into Cambodia. If they were able to get the area east of the Mekong as a base area against South Vietnam, they might use 1971 to get set for an effort to clobber us in 1972, which was an election year. Ambassador Habib said that that was why he didn't believe in putting forward another proposal. If we got caught in the 1972 elections, all things would come apart, and "that man" (the President) would never forgive us. After October 1971, there would be no problem, with our Vietnamization program a certainty and U.S. troops being pulled out regularly.

Ambassador Habib indicated that he wanted to talk about something else -- getting squared away on playing with the format of the Paris meetings. David (Ambassador Bruce) had wanted to move ahead, but Habib had talked him out of it. He personally believed that we should keep the format the same until at least after the first of next year and perhaps even a longer period (Dr. Kissinger interjected that it should be maintained at least until February 1). Then, we might be able to make some adjustments if we cared to do so, but whatever we did should reinforce the position that we were ready for serious negotiations. We should take the line that we were trying to improve the prospects and avoid propaganda. Ambassador Habib remarked in passing that he felt the other side was not getting much propaganda value from the talks, although Ambassador Bruce didn't agree.

Dr. Kissinger asked Ambassador Habib for his views on what the other side was up to. According to Ambassador Habib, they were waiting us out -- they had military plans, though, for the dry season, and political plans for South Vietnam in 1971. They were disillusioned about dissent in the U.S. and uneasy over the way it had died down, but still considered this factor a big ace in the hole. They felt the same about the political contradictions in South Vietnam. Dr. Kissinger expressed the opinion that the

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enemy was too weak to accept a cease-fire, but had two great political opportunities in the South Vietnamese and U.S. elections. It would want to see how the situation developed further before acting. After the South Vietnamese elections were over, it might want to wait out our own. Ambassador Habib thought that something might happen in the talks after the South Vietnamese elections, and our total withdrawal was something they should be willing to pay a price for. He expressed understanding of Dr. Kissinger's dissatisfaction with the present pace of the meetings, and wondered if he would have any problems with the resumption of private meetings after the first of the year. Dr. Kissinger said that he personally would have trouble on this, but was not making his views felt. Ambassador Habib stressed that we must have a consistent record on the talks, not just for Fulbright, but to assure popular support. We needed to have a "great record" to show those people who felt that negotiating was the course to pursue that we had sincerely tried. We would want to show that it was the other side that had welched on the bombing halt and not the South Vietnamese. Dr. Kissinger declared that his view was that we already had a great record and didn't need to do more.

Ambassador Habib suggested that another U.S. objective was to keep the channels of communication open with the other side. Dr. Kissinger noted that we had really shaken them when we had taken Lodge out of the talks. He went on to say that he himself was not Ambassador Habib's problem -- the President was much tougher and would prefer a generally harder line now. Ambassador Habib said that he had no problem in following a hard line. It had been no accident that the Communists had been hit hard when they called the President a liar, and no accident that they received a cold turkey account of the five points. What did Dr. Kissinger want the Delegation to do? Dr. Kissinger replied that it wouldn't hurt to give them the feeling that our patience was wearing thin and that we considered negotiations a quid pro quo for the bombing halt. Ambassador Habib wondered how this might be done -- was there another way than what we were already doing? Dr. Kissinger responded that the Delegation should just make the point occasionally. He doubted that varying the frequency of the meetings would have any effect.

On the question of frequency, Ambassador Habib suggested we might play around and resurrect the idea of restricted sessions and press the line that if they wanted to talk, then we would talk. They wouldn't accept, but we would end up in a better position. By proposing restricted or private sessions and talking about these we would give the signal that we were ready to talk if they wanted to do so.

Dr. Kissinger asserted that the other side could not simply kick us around and nauseam and never pay the price. Ambassador Habib declared that they had, in fact, paid the price, in that they looked inflexible. We hadn't done badly with the liberal press, at least those who wrote out of Paris. When at last week's meeting they had tried to make out that they had offered something new, not one of the Paris press corps had been taken in. Back in the U.S., of course there are always people such as Joe Kraft who played into their hands. Their thrust was to get rid of the GVN, since they preferred to deal with a disorganized South Vietnam rather than an organized one, as Dr. Kissinger had pointed out. Perhaps they might be concerned over U.S. military actions, but wouldn't change their negotiating stance.

Dr. Kissinger explained that military actions we had undertaken were not designed to influence the negotiations, but to slow down military preparations and make the North Vietnamese worry that they could go too far. If we could blunt their dry season offensive, either on the ground or by delaying their kicking it off, we would be in a better position next year. Ambassador Habib said that the enemy offensive would take place, but they were uneasy about it.